

Richard Horsley, *The Prophet Jesus and the Renewal of Israel: Moving Beyond a Diversionary Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 2012.

Horsley's book has two parts. In the first, he takes to task the notion that Jesus was an 'apocalyptic prophet' and in the second he makes the case for a Jesus as reformer (though that's my summation and not his terminology). As he notes in the introduction

... Part One will critically examine the recent debate between American scholars over the apocalyptic Jesus, and Part Two will sketch a provisional response and alternative to the prevailing individualism of Jesus studies (p. 4).

Consequently, part one contains very little new material. at least not for those familiar with the 'Quest'. New students and those unfamiliar with the issues will find it very informative and Horsely does a fine job of summarizing the issues and naming those involved in Questing for the apocalyptic Jesus (Schweitzer and Bultmann and others). He also does a good job of describing the non apocalyptic Jesus of Dom Crossan. And then he returns, as does history, to the apocalyptic Jesus and those who, like Dale Allison and his associates, find him in the Gospels.

This constant return to the apocalyptic Jesus annoys (it seems) Horsley who calls the whole thing a diversionary debate, or more colorfully, a windmill that too many have tilted at.

Liberal scholars, still operating on the assumptions of an earlier era, are doing battle against the dragon(s) of the apocalyptic scenario that they believe has been holding the historical Jesus captive (p. 53).

He continues

We may thus begin to suspect that 'the apocalyptic scenario' assumed in modern scholarly discussions of Jesus is a construct of modern scholars (p. 54).

Naturally Horsley's modern construct of Jesus will be better. And, in all honesty, it actually turns out that it is.

Having set aside the cul-de-sac of an apocalyptic Jesus, H. then turns to reconstruct a Jesus based on the sources themselves and not a reading-into of the sources. This Jesus he terms the 'relational' Jesus and a 'Jesus in movement in context'.

Largely unexplored in previous constructions of the historical Jesus are the leadership roles and distinctive forms of movements in Israelite culture that informed other movements contemporary with Jesus and his movement-roles that Jesus and his followers may have adapted (p. 78).

And

The steps in Chapters 7 and 8 will prepare the way for a provisional attempt in Chapters 9 and 10 to move from the Gospel sources to the Jesus-in-movement that they portray, attempting to bring together the multiple aspects in a more complex, relational sketch of the historical Jesus.

In short, Horsley's Jesus makes sense in his historical context. And indeed he does. The Jesus of Horsley is the Jesus of history: the Jesus who comes to renew Israel.

Perhaps Horsley's work will be the first nail in the coffin of the 'apocalyptic' Jesus and the 'Cynic' Jesus and all the other Jesuses concocted in the overly fertile imaginations of Questers and we can begin to think once more of the real Jesus. Jesus the Reformer.

Whether or not that happens, those intrigued by the subject and those engaged in the Quest owe it to themselves to think about Horsley's lucid and persuasive proposal.

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